

Dear Colleagues:

I have caused real pain to many people in our community, and hurt the credibility of our board, because of horrible words that I used in November.

I can only imagine how upsetting this incident was to Ms. Charline Grant, the parent involved, and to other members of the black community, who have suffered systemic racism for far too long. It is plainly unacceptable that anyone in public office would intentionally use such a word to describe another person.

That is why it is important for me to explain clearly what happened – not to excuse it, but so that you can understand, and so that I can in some way start to heal the harm I have caused.

Ms. Grant and other parents had raised concerns – in the media and with the board -- about racism experienced by their children. These concerns included the use of this ugly racial slur. I did not know Ms Grant's name, only that she was the parent who had raised these concerns. On that day in November, still suffering from the after-effects of a head injury earlier in the fall, I struggled for words as I tried to identify Ms Grant by referring to the concerns she and others had raised. The words came out horribly wrong, in the opposite way from what I had intended – as I explained immediately to the person with whom I was speaking. While I know that all of us have our words come out wrong way sometimes (particularly as we age), in this case the words were extremely hurtful ones.

When I later learned that someone else had also heard my remark, I wanted to apologize and explain, but found myself under investigation and not allowed to speak, until last week.

I feel heartsick and ashamed to have said something so hurtful – even unintentionally – and so foreign to the values I have lived by throughout my entire life. To those who are skeptical, please consider that in 17 years as a trustee, and 45 years as a child and educational psychologist, I have worked with and helped people from every background, and fought passionately to provide more equitable services and resources for marginalized people and groups in our society. I have also raised five children who will all tell you that there was absolutely no tolerance for any kind of racism in our family home.

While I am away today dealing with medical issues, upon my return I want to do everything I can to try to heal the harm that I have caused. I have reached out to Ms. Grant in the hope of apologizing to her personally. And I have asked our board to retain an expert in equity and restorative justice to review this situation and make recommendations on what I – and we – should do to promote healing, awareness, education and understanding.

Let me restate my deepest apology to Ms. Grant, to the community, and to each of you, and my commitment to act in the interests of our board, our children and our community.

Yours sincerely,

Nancy Elgie